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SETTING OBJECTIVES AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Setting objectives in the classroom helps focus the direction for learning and establish the path for teaching. For ELLs, setting objectives is especially important: Imagine the incredible amount of incoming stimuli bombarding these students as they try to learn both a new language *and* content knowledge. This sense of being overwhelmed can subside when students are told exactly what they are going to learn each day upon entering the classroom. Aware of the intended outcomes, they now know what to focus on and what to screen out as they process new information.

The educational environment also becomes a friendlier place for ELLs when they have a clearly stated target for learning. When you set objectives correctly, students work toward clearly defined goals and are able to explain what they are learning and why they are learning it.

It is critical to set both content objectives and language objectives for ELLs. Just as language learning cannot occur if we only focus on subject matter, content knowledge cannot grow if we only focus on learning the English language.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires evidence of progress in both academic achievement and English language proficiency for ELLs. Researchers and educators have strongly supported

the integration of content and language objectives (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Crandall, Spanos, Christian, Simich-Dudgeon, & Willetts, 1987; Dong, 2004/2005; Genesee, 1994; Mohan, 1990; Short, 1991; Simich-Dudgeon, McCreedy, & Schleppegrell, 1988). Systematic language development has to take place for students to eventually have the academic literacy skills they need to survive in the classroom. A firm foundation in academic English skills is necessary in order to meet content standards and pass challenging state assessments. Yet the question remains: How can we, as teachers, develop the language proficiency of ELLs while at the same time delivering content instruction?

Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) offer four reasons for combining language objectives with content objectives:

1. **Language forms and vocabulary will develop as students study areas of interest.** Correct grammatical form and necessary vocabulary are best learned in the context of content areas (e.g., modeling the past tense when talking about history).
2. **Motivation plays a role in learning complex language structures.** Low motivation can hinder language acquisition because, as with low self-esteem and anxiety, it blocks language stimulation from reaching the brain. This block is also known as an "affective filter" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). High motivation, on the other hand, results in an increased ability to learn and use a new language.
3. **Teachers can activate and build on students' prior knowledge in the content area.** ELLs may not have studied the American Revolution in their native country, but they may have studied another revolution or even experienced a modern conflict in their homeland. By accessing and activating such knowledge, you can prepare students to learn about analogous events in U.S. history.
4. **Language structure and form should be learned in authentic contexts rather than through contrived drills in language workbooks.** For example, when studying the American Revolution, students may learn about the type of clothing relevant to the 18th century. You can initiate the use of if-then statements by asking the class, "If you had to wear a uniform, how would you show your individuality?" While English-dominant students can write their ideas, ELLs can verbalize their thoughts using the sentence starter: "If I had to wear a uniform, then I would . . ."

Educators started using such content-based ESL instruction—also called sheltered instruction—in the 1980s. The use of the phrases “content-based ESL” and “sheltered instruction” varies based on geography (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). In the eastern half of the United States, the labels “ESL content” and “content ESL” are used, whereas those on the West Coast tend to use “sheltered instruction.” In California, the phrase used is “specially designed academic instruction in English,” or SDAIE. We will use “sheltered instruction” in this book.

Sheltered instruction has long been the medium for delivering content knowledge in a way that allows both concepts and academic English proficiency to be nourished. In sheltered instruction, academic content is taught to ELLs in English by using techniques such as speaking slowly, using visual aids and manipulatives, and avoiding the use of idioms. Devices and procedures for sheltering instruction include the following:

- Manipulatives, miniature objects, realia
- Visuals (photos, pictures, drawings)
- Body movement and pantomime
- Facial expressions and gestures
- Clear expression and articulation
- Short, simple sentences
- Eye contact with students
- High-frequency vocabulary
- Reduction of idiomatic expressions
- Personalized language and nouns favored over pronouns
- More description through synonyms
- Prior content introduction (preview)

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), developed by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2000), is a research-based model that many mainstream teachers use to better instruct ELLs. This model meets the NCLB requirement that a school’s method of language instruction be research-based. The SIOP was first used as a research instrument; its effectiveness was tested over six years by the National Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence before it was modified into a system for lesson planning and instruction. It emphasizes both content and language objectives in grade-level curriculum, helping teachers and schools teach English to ELLs while also helping students meet challenging state standards.

The SIOP model makes academic content comprehensible and encourages language learning by highlighting key features of the English language. To do this effectively, teachers must set content

objectives while also reviewing which linguistic functions and structures in the lesson students will need in order to effectively participate.

Determining Language Functions and Structures

Fathman, Quinn, and Kessler (1992) point out that “language functions are specific uses of language for accomplishing certain purposes” (p. 12). (A lesson using similarities and differences, for example, would have the language function of comparing.) Let’s suppose you are working with a 2nd grade class on communities. You ask the students to make a map of the community and provide directions from home to school, or from school to a nearby park. What function of language will the students need to complete this exercise? The language function (or purpose) required in this instance is giving directions. Are there other English demands in this lesson? Are certain language structures, such as particular verb tenses, possessives, plurals, adverbs, or vocabulary words, needed to communicate the directions from home to school or to the park? When you take these issues into consideration, you will see that students need to know the command form of the verb “to go” and also be well versed in numbers and directional vocabulary (i.e., “Go two blocks and turn right”) in order to successfully complete the assignment.

According to Gibbons (1991), a multitude of language functions occur in the classroom each day, including the following:

- Agreeing and disagreeing
- Apologizing
- Asking for assistance or directions
- Asking for permission
- Classifying
- Commanding/giving instructions
- Comparing
- Criticizing
- Denying
- Describing
- Enquiring/questioning
- Evaluating
- Explaining
- Expressing likes and dislikes
- Expressing obligation
- Expressing position
- Hypothesizing
- Identifying
- Inferring
- Planning and predicting
- Refusing
- Reporting
- Sequencing
- Suggesting
- Warning
- Wishing and hoping

able to connect 10 pictures with their matching vocabulary terms with 80 percent accuracy") will restrict the breadth of learning for ELLs. They will do better with a more general goal, such as "Students will be able to predict meanings of weather vocabulary by drawing pictures."

Classroom Recommendations

Based on the three generalizations above, *Classroom Instruction That Works* presents two recommendations for classroom practices: Set goals that are specific but flexible, and contract with students to attain specific learning goals.

The first recommendation parallels the third generalization above: Goals, though important, should be general enough to allow for some flexibility. The second recommendation—contracting with students to attain specific goals—helps ELLs because it gives them a great deal of control over their learning. For example, let's say the children in a kindergarten class decide at the beginning of each week how many "squares" they will earn. They earn squares for listening, helping, putting things away, and other behaviors. Each child fills out a contract by writing down his name and how many squares he plans to earn. The teacher notes the squares on a clipboard, and at the end of the week, she reconciles the accomplishments with the contracts. Those who meet the contract agreements earn token rewards, such as bookmarks or pencils.

Classroom Example

Here is an example from a 3rd grade classroom that shows how you can take a lesson designed for English-speaking students and modify it to set language objectives for ELLs in each stage of language acquisition.

Subject: Social Studies

Content Objective: To help students understand that making choices can be difficult because it often involves trade-offs.

Because money is a limited resource, people must make important choices about how to spend it. These choices often involve trade-offs: People must often give up buying one thing in order to buy something else. To help students understand the concept of trade-offs, ask students to imagine that they are going on a camping trip and have \$120 they have saved to spend on camping supplies.

The local camping supply store offers certain types of supplies at the specified prices (see Figure 3.1). Ask students: "Which supplies

will you buy, and why? Which will you choose to go without, and why?" Tell students that they will need to make a list of the supplies they will buy, the prices for each item, the total amount they will spend, and the reasons they have made these particular choices.

Figure 3.1

Prices of Supplies for "Going Camping" Activity

Backpack: \$40	Flashlight: \$8
Binoculars: \$30	Lightweight radio: \$30
Canteen: \$6	Matches: \$3
Compass: \$10	Rain poncho: \$5
Cooking set: \$30	Sewing kit: \$3
Emergency blanket: \$15	Six-inch hunting knife: \$12
Emergency candle: \$7	Swiss army knife: \$25
Emergency supply kit: \$25	Tent for two people: \$35
Emergency towel: \$3	Tent for three people: \$60
Fire-starter kit: \$7	Utensils: \$3

When students have completed the activity, initiate a class discussion about the choices that they made. Which items were most commonly chosen by the students? Which items were the least popular choices? What were the factors that influenced the students' decisions in making trade-offs?

Preproduction

The language objective is to learn the vocabulary of camping supplies, the language function is naming, and the language structure is vocabulary words. While the English-dominant students are working on the activity, Preproduction students can work in a small group with you. They could learn the words necessary for this lesson, which should include all the items, along with the prices. You will need the items, or at least pictures of them. After learning the vocabulary, the students could be given play money and allowed to buy certain items.

Steps for teaching vocabulary at this stage are as follows:

1. Identify a new word and elicit background knowledge. You can do this by showing several pictures and prompting

- students to identify them by asking questions (e.g., "Which one is the flashlight?").
2. Explain the meaning of the word with pictures and gestures.
 3. Have students create a visual representation of the new word.

Early Production

The language objective is to use the vocabulary of camping supplies and correct grammar, the language function is naming and labeling, and the language structure is grammatical components. Early Production students can match the camping items or pictures to the written words. They can also put price tags on items. Students at this stage can be given play money and allowed to buy certain items. If you give them a limited amount of money, they will have to make some choices.

You should circulate during this activity. When you confer with students, you will hear grammatical errors. Students should never be overtly corrected, but it is always appropriate to model back correct English usage. For example, if a student says, "Buy tent," you model by saying: "Oh, you want to buy the tent."

Speech Emergence

The language objective is to speak and write expanded sentences using "because," the language function is explaining and describing, and the language structure is "because." Some Speech Emergence students may be able to complete the objective as stated for English-dominant students. The students may need to review the items and the vocabulary associated with the items. This could be done either with you or with English-dominant students in the class.

These students will need assistance putting together an answer for your question: "Which supplies will you choose to go without, and why?" You might give them some sentence starters that encourage verbal or written use of "because." For example: "I'm not going to buy (item name) because . . ." or "Because (item name) is (price), I'm going to buy it."

Intermediate and Advanced Fluency

The language objective is to participate in a class discussion by agreeing with factors already heard or by introducing new factors, the language function is discussing the factors that influenced trade-offs, and the language structure is expressing influencing factors during discussion. (In a discussion, a student can add on to what another student says or introduce a new idea.)

Intermediate and Advanced Fluency students can participate in the activity as designed for mainstream students. You will hear fewer

and fewer grammatical errors. Students' decisions will be influenced by their own opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. During the whole-class discussion, you can introduce more academic vocabulary, which will help these students sound more like a book.

Feedback

Effective learning requires feedback. When teaching ELLs, it is particularly important to ensure that your feedback is comprehensible, useful, and relevant.

Oliver (2003) notes that the way in which teachers correct language usage affects students' verbal modifications. When teacher feedback on errors is constructive, students use the feedback to rephrase. According to Schoen and Schoen (2003) and Short (1991), rather than immediately correcting students, teachers should simply restate what the students say using the correct grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary. Students can refer to this model in the future when they want to say something similar. Modeling correct grammar is beneficial for the student, but overemphasizing grammar is not.

To be able to give feedback on language, you must have a firm foundation in how our language works. Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) put forth a strong rationale for the need for classroom teachers to understand language function and structure: Because knowledge of English language usage has been emphasized less and less over time, they recommend more training for teachers in the areas of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language use.

Thornbury (1999) and Brown (2000) contend that if language learners only get positive messages about their output, they will not make attempts to restructure their grammar. If they think that everything they are saying is accurate, they will stop short of full language proficiency and their incorrect usage will become "fossilized." As an example, Thornbury recommends some possible responses for teachers when responding to the error in the sentence "He has a long hair":

- "He has long hair." This is a correction in the strictest sense of the word. The teacher simply repairs the student's utterance.
- "No article." The teacher's move is directed at pinpointing the kind of error the student has made in order to prompt self-correction.
- "I'm sorry, I didn't understand." This is known as a clarification request.
- "A long hair is just one single hair, like you find in your soup. For the hair on your head you wouldn't use an article; you would say:

He has long hair." This is an example of reactive teaching, where instruction is in response to errors.

- "Oh, *he has long hair, has he?*" This technique (sometimes called reformulation) is an example of covert feedback, disguised as a conversational aside.

Error correction can take many forms; it varies from the simple to the complex. Talk with your school's ESL teachers regarding the forms of error correction that work best for them. In this book, we will be reminding you to model by repairing (first example above) and reformulating (last example above) when an ELL makes an error.

Generalizations from *Classroom Instruction That Works*

The authors of *Classroom Instruction That Works* gleaned four generalizations about feedback from the research.

1. **Feedback should be corrective in nature.** The more information you can provide on what is correct and what is incorrect about a student's oral or written responses, the better. This can be helpful to ELLs, but not when correcting their grammatical errors or their articulation mistakes. As discussed above, the best way to provide corrective feedback when grammar or pronunciation errors are made is simply to model the correct English without overtly calling attention to the error.
2. **Feedback should be timely.** Timing can be critical for ELLs, particularly when you are offering feedback by verbally modeling correct grammar or pronunciation.
3. **Feedback should be criterion-referenced.** The research indicates that using criterion-referenced feedback is better than using norm-referenced feedback. In other words, telling students how they are progressing in learning specific types of knowledge and skills is better than giving them a score reflecting the number of correct answers. The practice of using rubrics, a method of providing criterion-referenced feedback, is especially helpful for ELLs.
4. **Students can effectively provide some of their own feedback through self-evaluation.** ELLs can monitor their own progress in learning English and subject matter by keeping track of their performance as language and academic learning occurs.

Classroom Recommendations

We recommend using rubrics to provide feedback on declarative knowledge (information) or procedural knowledge (processes and skills). This practice produces many benefits when used with ELLs in a mainstream class. When rubrics are tied to a student's work, the student better understands expectations. Rubrics also allow grading to be less subjective and more comprehensible to the student.

If ELLs can be involved in the development of their own rubrics, all the better! When rubrics are jointly constructed, there is a clearer understanding of what constitutes an acceptable performance, and the rubric score becomes far more meaningful than a traditional letter grade or even a teacher-created rubric.

Teachers should also be sure to provide feedback on assessments. Some of the best feedback you can give ELLs is letting them know what was correct or incorrect in their use of written English. You will need to walk a careful line when correcting errors, as you want to identify essential corrections but not overwhelm or discourage students by identifying *all* of the errors you see or hear.

When giving feedback on written language, you should make sure that students understand a system of correction symbols, such as those presented in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2
Correction Symbols

Symbol	Meaning
^	<i>Insert</i>
¶	<i>New paragraph</i>
≡	<i>Capitalize</i>
V.T.	<i>Verb tense</i>
A.N.	<i>Adjective-noun order</i>
Subj.	<i>Need subject</i>

As a student's English proficiency progresses, errors can be marked in ways that require more and more of the student's attention. Earle-Carlne (n.d.) recommends the following approach to marking errors for ELLs, in which the teacher scaffolds learning by making the student work harder to identify the error as her English proficiency increases:

1. Circle or underline each error and write the correction symbol above it.
2. Highlight the error without supplying the symbol.
3. Write only the symbol in the margin of any line with this error.
4. Put only a check in the margin indicating that there is an error of some sort. (p. 1)

Classroom Instruction That Works also recommends student-led feedback, in which students explain to each other—in pairs or small groups—what is correct or incorrect in a product. However, peer feedback never means that students score each other's papers or issue grades to each other. Fathman and colleagues (1992) report that, for ELLs, peer feedback can be more beneficial than teacher feedback because the students may feel less self-conscious receiving corrections or recommendations in a small group.

The Word-MES formula can help you to match oral and written corrective feedback to your ELLs' stage of language acquisition as follows.

Preproduction

Students will benefit from help with vocabulary and word selection. These students can respond by pointing or gesturing. Instead of asking a question requiring a verbal response, prompt with "Point to" or "Show me." After students point, give feedback by saying, "Yes, that is a (name of item)."

Early Production

Students need you to provide feedback by modeling correct English whenever possible. For example, if a student says or writes, "Goed the game," model the correct utterance by offering, "Oh, you went to the game." The key here is subtle modeling. Overt correction can inhibit a student from using language.

"Syntax surgery" is a useful strategy for helping students to see differences between the word order in English and the word order in their primary language (Herrell & Jordan, 2004). First, you identify a sentence the student has said or written incorrectly. Then you write the words on a sentence strip, cut it apart, and reorganize the words into correct English order. When students see the sentence rearrangement and hear your explanation, they are more likely to use the correct syntax in the future. For example, placing the adjective after the noun is a common mistake for Spanish-speaking students when learning English, as this is the correct word order in Spanish. To perform syntax surgery, you would select a phrase or sentence (e.g., "dog brown") and rearrange it in the correct order ("brown dog") while explaining why you did so.

Speech Emergence

Students can use your assistance focusing on finer points of grammar by expanding a sentence verbally or by writing an expanded sentence for the student. If the student says or writes, "The boy wore a coat to school," the teacher can expand the sentence by adding an adjective: "The boy wore a warm coat to school." A student in this stage could also be exposed to using coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*, *or*) in compound sentences. You can therefore expand what these students say or write by joining two simple sentences.

Intermediate and Advanced Fluency

Students should be using language to compare, describe, debate, persuade, justify, create, and evaluate so they can sound like a book. The structure of their sentences, the use of vocabulary, and the overall organization of their written work should be approximating the writing of their English-speaking peers. Thus, you can provide feedback that is similar to the kind you would offer native English speakers. It is important for these students to be exposed to a more sophisticated form of language.

Summary

Setting clear language and content objectives for ELLs is critical for effective teaching and learning. English language learners have to learn not only the content of a subject but also the language of a subject. Stimulating English through word selection (vocabulary), modeling, expanding, and helping students sound more like a book can make subject learning and language learning happen simultaneously. Students are doing double duty by learning a new language and new information, just as you are doing double duty by identifying content objectives and sources for language objectives.

Two things ELLs really want to know are "Will the teacher like me?" and "Can I do the work?" Providing feedback on English acquisition will demonstrate a level of "like" they may not have experienced before. Errors are going to naturally occur in the process of learning a second language, and the best way for you, as a teacher, to deal with them is to model correct structures by unceremoniously restating what students say. Overtly correcting grammar and pronunciation can generate anxiety, which in turn can inhibit natural language acquisition.